

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

SOUND PROCESSING METHOD AND APPARATUS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

5 The present invention relates to a sound processing method and apparatus for performing predetermined sound processing such as sound field control, sound quality control and interval control on an input audio signal to obtain a desired audio signal, and more particularly to
10 a sound processing method and apparatus especially suitable for sound processing of audio signals containing sounds from a plurality of sound generating sources.

Prior Art

15 In a conventional sound processing apparatus, an input audio signal of one system is assumed to be a sound source signal of one system, and desired sound processing is performed on this input signal according to predetermined processing steps. This will be
20 explained in detail by referring to a conventional sound field addition apparatus as shown in FIG. 7. In the apparatus shown in FIG. 7, a sound field control operation is performed on audio signals XL, XR that are input as a 2-channel stereophonic signal by sound field
25 controllers 101a, 101b with a sound field control function $f(X)$. The sound field-controlled signals fXL, fXR are output-controlled by an output controller 102 to be output as output audio signals YL, YR.

30 Another known example of sound field control processing system is disclosed by Japanese Patent Publication (Kokoku) No. 7-44759, in which sound field

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control is performed on a sum signal and a difference signal which are generated from a 2-channel stereophonic signal as an input signal.

5 However, no sound processing apparatus has ever been known in which an input audio signal is first separated into a plurality of separated signal components, which are then subjected to preliminary processing, and independent sound processing is performed on each of these signal components. Thus, it has been very difficult to selectively enhance or suppress individual sound source signals contained in the input audio signal to create a natural spatial impression of sound with a presence.

10 For example, in a sound field addition apparatus for adding a hall sound field to an input audio signal, it is basically assumed that a single sound source exists only on a stage. Addition of initial reflecting sounds or reverberation sounds is carried out based on this assumption. Thus, as long as the input audio signal can be regarded as a signal from a single sound source, the conventional sound field addition apparatus can perform optimum sound field addition processing without any particular preliminary processing such as separation, enhancement and suppression of the input audio signal. However, when many sound sources also exist outside of the stage, the sound field control based on the above assumption cannot provide satisfactory results.

25 More specifically, even if sounds recorded at a plurality of sound fields (places) are contained in the input audio signal, the conventional sound processing apparatus performs identical sound processing on these sounds from the different sound sources contained in the input audio signal so that the resulting output sound is not necessarily natural.

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When, for example, on-the-spot broadcast speech sound and ambient sound from the audience are mixed in the input signal as in a live sports broadcasting, addition of a hall sound field should be performed only on the ambient sound. However, the conventional sound processing apparatus adds reflecting and reverberation sounds not only to the ambient sound but also to the broadcast speech sound so that the reproduced speech sound becomes extremely unnatural like so-called public address system speech. Further, when an interval change is performed by the conventional apparatus, the interval of the ambient sound is changed together with that of the on-the-spot broadcast speech sound, resulting in a very uncomfortable reproduced sound.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention to provide a sound processing method and apparatus which are capable of performing sound processing on input audio signals containing a plurality of signal components being different in desired sound processing conditions, in a manner that allows natural sound to be reproduced.

To attain the above object, the present invention provides a sound processing method comprising the steps of separating an input audio signal of at least one system into a plurality of separated signal components, subjecting each signal component of at least part of the plurality of separated signal components to individual sound processing according to the signal component, and outputting the plurality of separated signal components as at least one audio signal after each signal component of the at least part thereof is subjected to the individual sound processing.

In a preferred embodiment of the present invention,

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into a synthesized audio signal, and outputs the synthesized audio signal, or alternatively, the output controller outputs the plurality of separated signal components with the at least part thereof subjected to the individual sound processing, separately as audio signals.

In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the signal separator performs spectrum analysis upon the input audio signal to extract a specific signal component, and subtracts the extracted specific signal component from the input audio signal to obtain a remaining signal component of the input audio signal.

In another preferred embodiment of the present invention, the signal separator comprises a plurality of signal enhancement/suppression devices that enhance part of a plurality of signal components contained in the input audio signal, and suppress remaining signal components.

In a further preferred embodiment of the present invention, the input audio signal comprises audio signals of a plurality of channels, and the signal separator comprises a plurality of signal separators corresponding respectively to the plurality of channels, and wherein each of the plurality of signal separators performs predetermined sound processing by supplementarily referring to at least one of the audio signals of at least one other channels than a channel corresponding thereto, thereby improving accuracy of separation of the input audio signal of the corresponding channel into a plurality of signal components.

In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the sound processor comprises a sound field controller that performs sound field control processing upon each signal component of the at least part of the plurality

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of separated signal components.

The sound processor may be modified to perform the following operations, for example:

5 1) selectively eliminate at least part of the plurality of separated signal components, and use an externally input audio signal, instead;

2) change sound quality or voice quality of each signal component of at least part of the plurality of separated signal components;

10 3) change pitch of each signal component of at least part of the plurality of separated signal components; and

15 4) change speed relative to time axis or speech speed of each signal component of at least part of the plurality of separated signal components.

According to the above construction of the present invention, the input audio signal is first separated into a plurality of separated signal components, at least part of which are each be sound-processed
20 individually and independently so that desired reproduced sound can be obtained.

In sound processing of an input audio signal in which on-the-spot speech sound and ambient sound are mixed as in a live sports broadcasting, according to the
25 invention, the input signal is first separated into a plurality of separated signal components, and each signal component of at least part of the separated signal components is subjected to sound processing which is suitable for the signal component, before it is
30 output-controlled. Optimum sound processing of each of the signal components is thus made possible, and desired reproduced sound can be created that is natural and harmonizes with listener's feeling. When the present invention is applied to a live sports broadcasting, for
35 example, ambient sound and on-the-spot speech sound are

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separated from each other and subjected to separate sound processing so that natural live broadcast sound can be provided to listeners.

5 The above and other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will be more apparent from the following detailed description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

10 FIG. 1 is a block diagram showing the basic construction of a sound processing apparatus according to an embodiment of the present invention;

15 FIG. 2 is a block diagram showing the construction of a sound processing apparatus according to the present invention applied to sound processing of a live sports broadcast sound as a specific example of the sound processing apparatus of FIG. 1;

20 FIG. 3 is a block diagram useful in explaining the construction of a signal separator of the sound processing apparatus of FIG. 2;

25 FIG. 4 is a block diagram showing the basic construction of a sound processing apparatus according to another embodiment of the present invention which employs signal enhancement and suppression processing circuits as the signal separator;

30 FIG. 5 is a block diagram showing the basic construction of a sound processing apparatus according to still another embodiment of the present invention applied to sound processing of a two channel signal;

FIG. 6 is a block diagram showing the construction of a sound processing apparatus of the present invention applied to sound processing of a live sports broadcasting as a specific example of the sound processing apparatus of FIG. 5; and

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FIG. 7 is a block diagram showing the construction of a prior art sound processing apparatus.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

5 The present invention will now be described with reference to the drawings showing embodiments thereof.

FIG. 1 shows the basic construction of a sound processing apparatus according to an embodiment of the present invention.

10 An input audio signal X is input to a signal separator 1 where the input signal is separated according to a predetermined method (algorithm) into a plurality of separated signal components corresponding to the types of sound sources. The plurality of separated signal components X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n are fed to
 15 respective sound processors $2_1, 2_2, \dots, 2_n$. In the illustrated embodiment, as many signal processors 2_1 to 2_n as the number of the separated signal components X_1 to X_n obtained by the signal separator 1 are provided. However, depending upon the kind of processing operation
 20 to be performed, the input audio signal X may be fed to an output controller 3 without being processed. The sound processors 2_1 to 2_n perform sound processing upon respective separated signal components in a manner suitable for the signal components using respective
 25 sound processing functions $f_1(x), f_2(X), \dots, f_n(X)$, and output sound processed signal components $f_1(X_1), f_2(X_2), \dots, f_n(X_n)$ to the output controller 3. The output controller 3 performs mixing processing or the like on the sound processed signal components as input signals
 30 according to the specifications of a final output system such as the number and location of speakers, and output the resulting output audio signals Y_1, Y_2, \dots, Y_N .

FIG. 2 shows the construction of a sound processing

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apparatus of the present invention applied to sound processing of a live sports broadcast sound as a specific example of the sound processing apparatus of FIG. 1.

5 An input audio signal generated from live sports broadcasting contains on-the-spot speech sound of an announcer and/or a commentator and ambient sound. The input audio signal X is separated into two signal components, that is, on-the-spot speech sound X1 and ambient sound X2, by the signal separator 1. The ambient sound signal component X2 is subjected to sound field control to provide the reproduced sound with a presence by a sound field controller 4, and the resulting sound field-controlled signal component $f(X2)$ is input to the output controller 3. The on-the-spot speech sound signal component X1 is not subjected to any processing operation in order not to impair the feeling of localization. The output controller 3 properly processes the signal components X1, $f(X2)$ and outputs an output audio signal Y.

10 FIG. 3 shows an example of the construction of the signal separator 1. An optimum method for signal separation should be adopted according to the input audio signal to be separated, and the method for signal separation is not limited to a specific one according to the present invention. In the present embodiment, the input audio signal X is assumed to contain a mixture of on-the-spot speech sound and ambient sound as in a live sports broadcasting. In the signal separator 1 in FIG. 3, the on-the-spot speech sound component X1 is first extracted by a spectrum analyzer 11. Then, the extracted speech sound component X1 is subtracted from the original signal X to obtain the ambient sound component X2.

15 A flow of the signal separating operation will be

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described below with reference to FIG. 3.

From the audio signal that is input to the signal separator 1, only a high frequency band component contained in the ambient sound is extracted by a high-pass filter (HPF) 12, and only a low frequency band component that contains the on-the-spot speech sound component is extracted by a low-pass filter (LPF) 13. The low frequency band signal component that is output from the low-pass filter 13 is subjected to a down-sampling operation by a down-sampling part 14. The down-sampling ratio of the down-sampling operation is different depending upon the band splitting frequency, and the ratio is determined to be in such a range that information contained in the frequency component is not lost. For example, an equal half-split method may be employed to perform down-sampling to one half frequency, wherein the information contained in the signal component is not lost by the down-sampling to one half frequency. Such a down-sampling operation serves to reduce the amount of processing operation such as frequency spectrum analysis by the spectrum analyzer 11, and speed up the processing operation.

The signal component that has undergone the down-sampling operation is then subjected to waveform extraction with a suitable time window by a waveform extraction part 15. Then, the signal component of the extracted waveform is fed to the spectrum analyzer 11, wherein the signal component is first transformed into a frequency domain signal component by a FFT part 16. The spectrum analyzer 11 of the present embodiment adopts Fast Fourier Transformation (FFT) as the transformation method. The present invention is, however, not limited to this particular method. The signal component that has been time-frequency transformed in the present embodiment is defined as being represented by the

frequency information of each frequency component and the intensity information of each frequency component.

Next, the transformed frequency domain signal component from the FFT part 16 is subjected to
5 extraction and identification of the on-the-spot speech sound component by a harmonic component extraction part 17 and a sound source identification part 18. A sound signal of on-the-spot speech sound or the like basically has a harmonic structure that the fundamental wave
10 component is accompanied by higher harmonic components with frequencies which are integral multiples of the fundamental frequency, and therefore it is determined by the extraction and identification operations whether a signal component having such a harmonic structure, that
15 is, an on-the-spot speech sound component, exists in the frequency domain signal component or not. For the determination, Spectrum Summation Method or the like may be used. If, as a result of the extraction and identification operations, it is determined that an on-
20 the-spot speech sound component exists in the frequency domain signal component, the frequency and intensity information of harmonic components including the fundamental wave of the on-the-spot speech sound component are identified.

25 However, the signal component identified by the extraction and identification operations contains, at this stage, not only the on-the-spot speech sound component and higher harmonic components thereof, but also an ambient sound component of the same frequencies
30 superposed on the former. Thus, it is necessary to eliminate this ambient sound component. It is theoretically impossible to completely separate these components having the same frequency. In the present embodiment, based on the assumption that the spectrum
35 envelope (frequency characteristics) of the ambient

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sound is nearly constant in time, the power variation of the frequency characteristics is estimated from instantaneous power of the input audio signal and instantaneous power of the high frequency band signal component by an ambient sound spectrum envelope estimation part 20. In the ambient sound spectrum envelope estimation part 20, a mean spectrum envelope of the ambient sound component is obtained by a statistical calculation based upon stored spectrum envelope information and a spectrum envelope of the ambient sound obtained when the speech sound signal is determined to be absent.

An on-the-spot speech sound signal component (signal to be separated) is obtained by subtracting the frequency component estimated by the ambient sound spectrum envelope estimation part 20 from the frequency component that is output by the harmonic component extraction part 17 and sound source identification part 18, using Spectrum Subtraction Method or the like by a spectrum subtraction part 19. The obtained signal component (signal to be separated) is fed to an inverse FFT part 21, wherein the signal component in the frequency domain is transformed into a signal component in the time domain. The transformed signal component is fed to an up-sampling part 24 to be subjected to an up-sampling operation which finally returns the signal component to a signal component having the original sampling frequency. The returned signal component is output as the on-the-spot speech sound signal component X1 to the sound field controller 4.

On the other hand, a spectrum subtraction part 22 subtracts in the frequency domain the on-the-spot speech sound component (signal to be separated) from the signal component output from the FFT part 16. The resulting signal component is subjected to an inverse FFT

operation by an inverse FFT part 23 to be returned into the time domain. A high frequency band signal component having passed through the high-pass filter 12 is added to the signal component returned into the time domain by an adder 25 to obtain the ambient sound signal component X2. The ambient sound signal component X2 thus obtained is output to the sound field controller 4 through a different output terminal from one through which the on-the-spot speech sound signal component X1 is output. In the above described manner, the input audio signal is separated into a plurality of separated signal components by the signal separator 1 constructed as described above.

In the present embodiment, considering that in general an on-the-spot speech sound should be clear and easily audible, no addition of a sound field effect such as reflecting sound and reverberation sound components is made to the on-the-spot speech sound component or the amount of addition is minimized. On the other hand, reflecting sound and reverberating sound components are added in suitable amounts to the ambient sound component, using the well known technique of virtual sound image localization processing or the like in order to provide the reproduced sound with a presence such that the reflecting sound and reverberation sound surround the whole sound field. It is to be understood that such a sound field control performed by the sound field controller 4 depends strongly upon the nature of the input audio signal or the user's requirements, and therefore there is no limitation on the controlling method itself.

In the embodiment described above, the signal separator 1 is constructed such that the input audio signal is spectrum-analyzed to extract specific signal components. Alternatively, the signal separator may be

constructed such that a signal enhancement and suppression operation is performed on each of the signal components, as shown in FIG. 4. In the apparatus shown in FIG. 4, the signal separator 1 is composed of a plurality of signal enhancement/suppression parts 31₁ to 31_n. The audio signal X that is input to the signal separator 1 is separated into a plurality of separated signal components according to a predetermined method (algorithm). Among the plurality of separated signal components, signal components X₁, ..., X_n are enhanced or suppressed by the signal enhancement/suppression parts 31₁ to 31_n and are fed to sound processors 2₁ to 2_n, respectively. Here, basically, as many sound processors 2₁ to 2_n are provided as the number of the output signal components from the signal enhancement/suppression parts 31₁ to 31_n. Depending upon the kind of processing to be performed, the input audio signal may be fed directly to the output controller 3 without passing through the signal enhancement/suppression parts 31₁ to 31_n, i.e., without being processed. In the sound processors 2₁ to 2_n, a predetermined sound processing operation is performed on each enhanced/suppressed signal component, and the sound-processed signal components f₁(X₁), ..., f_n(X_n) are output to the output controller 3. The output controller 3 performs on the sound-processed signal components as input signals, an output control operation such as a mixing operation according to the sound reproducing system, and outputs the processed signals as the output audio signals Y₁, Y₂, ..., Y_N.

The above described embodiments deal with a single input signal. In the case of an input audio signal of two systems X_L, X_R as shown in FIG. 5, a left signal separator (L) 1a and a right signal separator (R) 1b are provided for a left input audio signal X_L and a right input audio signal X_R, respectively. Each of the signal

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separators 1a, 1b separates a corresponding input audio signal into a plurality of separated signal components $XL_1, \dots, XL_n, XR_1, \dots, XR_n$. Then, sound processors 2a₁ to 2a_n, 2b₁ to 2b_n each perform a sound processing operation individually upon a corresponding one of the separated signal components. The resulting processed signals are subjected to an output control operation according to the output system by the output controller 3, and then are output. In the case of such a plurality of input audio signals, a main component such as a component corresponding to a central location is often contained as a common component in each input signal. When, for example, this common component is the target component to be separated, a simple and relatively precise separation (cancelling and elimination for separation) is possible by carrying out necessary addition and subtraction of signal components after these input signals have been adjusted in level so as to bring the target component in each of these input signals to almost the same level. More specifically, for the purpose of improving the accuracy of the signal separation, as shown by broken lines in FIG. 5, the left input audio signal XL and the right input audio signal XR that are the input signals of the left and right channels, respectively, are input to the right signal separator (R) 1b and the left signal separator (L) 1a, respectively, as supplementary input signals XLs, XRs. The right signal separator (R) 1b and the left signal separator (L) 1a each perform an enhancement operation on the target signal component to be separated by referring to the supplementary input signal XLs or XRs to thereby improve the accuracy of separation of the input audio signal. It is to be understood that main targets for signal separation operation of the left signal separator (L) 1a and the right signal separator

(R) 1b remain to be the proper input audio signals to the respective channels, and therefore the use of the supplementary input signals is within the spirit and scope of the present invention.

5 FIG. 6 shows the construction of a sound processing apparatus according to the present invention, which is applied to sound processing of a live sports broadcasting as a specific example of the sound processing apparatus of FIG. 5. As basic input audio
10 signals, two-channel stereophonic input signals, i.e., a left channel input audio signal XL and a right channel input audio signal XR are input to the sound processing apparatus of FIG. 6. As a desired example, the signal components of the left and right input audio signals XL,
15 XR are assumed to be a speech sound in a typical live sports broadcasting program with a left on-the-spot speech sound component XLsp and a right on-the-spot speech sound component XRsp positioned in the center, and a left ambient sound component XLse and a right
20 ambient sound component XRse arranged somewhat spread in the background.

 The signal separator 1 has a construction based on the number of input signals. In the illustrated example, two systems, that is, the left signal separator
25 (L) 1a and the right signal separator (R) 1b, are provided. In the signal separator 1, an internal processing operation is performed on each of the left and right input audio signals XL, XR, so that each input audio signal is separated into an on-the-spot speech
30 sound component and an ambient sound component. In the case of the left input audio signal XL, for example, the input signal is separated into the left on-the-spot speech sound component XLsp and the left ambient sound component XLse by the left signal separator (L) 1a. The
35 internal signal separation operation is performed on

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each of the audio signals XL, XR that is input as a monaural signal. When the two-channel stereophonic input signals contain a sound component from the same sound source in the center as in the present embodiment, the left input audio signal XL and the right input audio signal XR which are the input signals of the left and right channels, respectively, can be input to the right signal separator (R) 1b and the left signal separator (L) 1a, respectively, as the above-mentioned supplementary input signals XLs, XRs, as shown by broken lines in FIG. 6, and an enhancing operation or a like operation can be performed on the target signal component to be separated, by referring to the supplementary input signals to improve the accuracy of the separation of the input audio signals. Then, a predetermined sound field control operation is performed on each on-the-spot speech sound component and each ambient sound component by each of sound field controllers 4a₁, 4a₂, 4b₁, 4b₂ which are provided in a number corresponding to the number of the separated signal components.

The sound field controllers 4a₁, 4a₂, 4b₁, 4b₂ are divided into ones 4a₁, 4b₁ having a sound field control function $f(x)$ for the on-the-spot speech sound component, and ones 4a₂, 4b₂ having a sound field control function $g(x)$ for the ambient sound component. A predetermined sound field control operation is performed on each component by each corresponding sound field controller 4a₁, 4a₂, 4b₁, or 4b₂. The left and right on-the-spot speech sound components $f(XLsp)$, $f(XRsp)$ and ambient sound components $g(XLse)$, $g(XRse)$ obtained by the sound field control of the sound field controllers 4a₁, 4a₂, 4b₁, 4b₂ are fed to the output controller 3. In the output controller 3, the left and right on-the-spot speech sound components fed from the

sound field controller 4a₁, 4b₁ are first synthesized by an adder 41. Next, the right ambient sound component g(XRse) and the on-the-spot speech sound component synthesized by the adder 41 and a multiplier 44 are synthesized by an adder 43, and the left ambient sound component g(XLse) and the on-the-spot speech sound component synthesized by the adder 41 and a multiplier 45 are synthesized by an adder 42. In this way, output signals in a form that matches the sound reproducing system, i.e., left and right output audio signals YL, YR, are output, to be reproduced in two-channel stereophonic reproduction.

Although the FIG. 6 example employs a sound reproducing system for reproducing two-channel stereophonic outputs YL, YR, the sound reproducing system itself is not limited in any way by the present invention. It is generally said that the presence of a sound field is enhanced by increasing the number of output channels. Needless to say, if the number of output channels is to be increased, the sound field controller will have to be also increased or changed in number so as to increase the number of outputs to accommodate the increased number of output channels. It is assumed here that the outputs generate a reproduced sound such that the on-the-spot speech sound is located at the center with the ambient sound located to the left and right sides.

The sound processing per each signal component according to the present invention is not limited to the above described sound field control operation. For example, when the invention is applied to a live sports broadcasting with an announcer and two commentators a, b, the sound processing may be performed such that the on-the-spot speech sound of the announcer is changed to a desired interval or sound quality, that of the

commentator a is silenced, and that of the commentator b is changed to a different speech speed.

For the aged and the handicapped with poor auditory function, sound processing is useful not simply for increasing the sound volume but also for improving the audibility of sound especially by emphasizing high frequency band components. On the other hand, for ambient sound, the sound volume adjustment, change of sound quality (equalizing) and the like are useful. Such a control operation depends upon the nature of input audio signals as well as on the taste of users, and the method of control is not limited to those described above. The signal that is processed by the sound processor 2 is finally fed to the output controller 3.

Further, the sound processing according to the present invention includes a processing operation of selectively eliminating the separated signal components and using an externally input signal, instead.

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